



# The Ability Center

The vocabulary list below was prepared to help improve communication between people with and without disabilities. Using positive language can be an important first step toward improving the accessibility, of making all feel welcome.

## **Basic Guidelines:**

- When possible, use person-first language unless otherwise indicated by the source.
- Ask the source how he or she would like to be described.

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## **Language Listing**

### **Disabled**

Recommended: Person with a disability

### **Confined to a wheelchair**

Recommended: Wheelchair user, \_(name) who uses a wheelchair

### **Handicap/handicapped/handicapable**

Recommended: Avoid using “handicap” and “handicapped” when describing a person. Refer to the person’s specific condition or use “person with a disability.”

### **Defect/birth defect**

Recommended: It is preferable to state that someone is “a person with a congenital disability,” “a person living with a congenital disability,” “has had a disability since birth,” or “was born with a disability.” Name the specific disability if possible.

### **Amputation/amputee**

Recommended: “Someone with an amputation” or amputee are both generally considered acceptable.

### **Developmental disabilities/disability**

Recommended: While it is acceptable to use the term “developmental disabilities,” it is preferable to use the name of the specific disability whenever possible.

### **Special Needs**

The word “special” in relationship to those with disabilities stigmatizes that which is different.

Recommended: It is more accurate to cite the specific disability or disabilities. The term “functional needs” is preferred when a term is required.

\*Content adapted from the [National Center on Disability and Journalism](#)